

## SPECIAL MEETING – MANSFIELD TOWN COUNCIL

February 22, 2011

Mayor Elizabeth Paterson called the special meeting of the Mansfield Town Council to order at 6:30 p.m. in the Community Room of the Mansfield Community Center.

### I. ROLL CALL

Present: Keane, Kochenburger, Moran, Paterson, Paulhus, Ryan, Shapiro

Excused: Lindsey, Schaefer

### II. WORK SESSION

#### School Building Project

Mayor Paterson welcomed members of the Board of Education and the Superintendent of Schools to the meeting.

Mayor Paterson commented that it is the responsibility of the Council to make fiscal decisions for the Town and the responsibility of the Board of Education to make educational decisions for the Town. Ms. Paterson stated that determinations will need to be made as to what the community will support, what the community can afford, and if and when to bring the issue to referendum.

Town Manager Matt Hart and Director of Finance Cherie Trahan presented a matrix of the options outlining existing and proposed reimbursement rates, facility improvements, instructional/program improvements, community benefits and issues and concerns. Construction Manager Tom Di Mauro reported that the cost estimates for new construction will need to be adjusted to reflect the current situation. These changes will be included in the material for the next work session.

Council members discussed the possible effects of the changes to the reimbursement rates and timing set forth in the Governor's proposed budget. Ms. Trahan will discuss with the Town's bond counsel what would need to be done if the project is sent to referendum and then the reimbursement rates significantly change.

Members were asked to outline their current positions.

Mr. Kochenburger prefers the Two New School Option (Original Option E) but would vote for the status quo until the Town is in a better fiscal position. He stated that when the Town does build new schools they should be not just better schools but schools that will offer significant educational benefits.

Mr. Paulhus spoke in favor of the Two New School Option (Revised Option E) stating that it is never a perfect time to build but the Town has done the work and it is now time to move forward.

Ms. Keane discussed the difference between the needs and wants of the Town stating that we "need" to do improvements to the schools but that we might not be able to afford the "wants" of the Town. Ms. Keane is not in favor of the One School Option (Option D) for educational reasons and would prefer the 20-Year Improvements to the Buildings Option (Option A Cash Basis) until the economy turns around at which time the situation could be reevaluated.

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Mr. Shapiro stated that he is generally a proponent of the Two New School Option (Option E Revised) as good schools are important to Mansfield. The current schools are from the 1950's era and investing additional money into them may not make economic sense. As the next step he is in favor of sending the Two New School Option to referendum and then if the residents reject the proposal the Council can reevaluate their options.

Mr. Ryan believes the Board of Education deserves a vote on their recommendation although he feels the Town cannot afford two new schools and will not support that option. Mr. Ryan is concerned the education budgets would suffer. He is confident the One School Option (Option D) could work and feels that the Town has only heard from one faction of residents regarding the educational value of one school versus two schools.

Ms. Moran stated the Two New School Option (Option E Revised) sounds wonderful but feels that, given the falling reimbursement rates, the Town may not be able to afford this option. The data on the educational value of the One School Option (Option D) is mixed but Ms. Moran is convinced that the staff and administration are what determine the educational level of a school. She does not support the current situation nor does she support Goodwin as one of the locations of the schools.

Mayor Paterson would ideally like to support the Two New School Option (Option E Revised) but is concerned there are other economic issues in Town which will also need to be addressed including the decrease in state funding, and necessary increase in the General Fund contribution to the Capital Improvement Fund, the Four Corners Water and Sewer Project, etc. Ms. Paterson does not support making the existing schools good for the next 20 years, but she could support the One School Option (Option D) or waiting a couple of years before making a decision and performing needed maintenance in the meantime.

After additional discussion regarding the options, locations, effects on both the Town's and Board of Education's budgets, and referendum wording the Council agreed by consensus to review resolutions at the next work session which would authorize 20-Year Improvements to all Buildings (Option A Cash Basis), One New Elementary School and Renovations to the Mansfield Middle School (Option D) and Two new Elementary Schools and Less Extensive Renovations to MMS (Option E Revised).

Ms. Moran moved and Mr. Ryan seconded to remove the \$450,000 for land acquisition costs from Revised Option E.

Mr. Shapiro requested the motion be withdrawn with the understanding that a vote on the location of the schools will occur prior to sending the resolution to referendum. Ms. Moran and Mr. Ryan agreed to withdraw the motion.

Town Manager Matt Hart will provide information on the potential impact the closing of schools would have on the neighborhoods, Goodwin in particular, and possible alternative uses of the closed buildings.

Arrangements will be made so Ms. Keane can participate in the March 1<sup>st</sup> meeting by phone.

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III. OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

Mike Sikoski, Wildwood Road, questioned the notice of the meeting with regards to location and the reduction in manpower required to realize the listed savings. Mr. Sikoski suggested the Town use the polling facility at UConn to query residents.

Ric Hossack, Middle Turnpike, stated he was glad to hear the Council discuss fiscal responsibility and feels the greatness of any school is not found in its facility but rather in the teachers and administration. He called for a 10 year moratorium to see what the tax benefits from the Downtown Partnership might be.

David Freudmann, Eastwood Road, believes that before any referendum is held the voters need to know the options and the facts. He feels that when a governing body sends a resolution to referendum there is an implied endorsement of the project. Mr. Freudmann expressed concern regarding the debt obligations of the Town.

Jay Rueckl, South Eagleville Road, applauded the efforts of the Council to evaluate the relative cost of the options but stated that he would vote against a One School Option.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Paulhus moved and Mr. Ryan seconded to adjourn the meeting at 9:03 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.

Elizabeth Paterson, Mayor

Mary Stanton, Town Clerk

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